

Dr. Dercum's Treatment for Neurasthenia

How to Cure "Nervous Prostration"

From Dr. Francis X. Dercum's Book "Rest, Suggestion and Other Therapeutic Measures in Nervous and Mental Diseases," Published by P. Blakiston's Sons & Co.

"In the demands that modern civilization makes upon the individual," writes Dr. Dercum, "the undue expenditure of energy that results in over-fatigue is a frequent occurrence. As a result, a condition is established in which neither physiologic rest nor food suffice any longer to rest the organism and the equilibrium observed in health. Gradually a well-defined neurosis (nervous disease) becomes established, and this is widely known among the laity as 'nervous prostration' and among physicians as neurasthenia."

Dr. Dercum then proceeds to discuss the symptoms of nervous breakdown, many of which have been announced as a part of President Wilson's trouble—the intense headaches, pains in the eyes, disturbed vision, backache, pains in the legs and arms, cough, tender spots along the spine, the feeling of numbness in the legs, sensitiveness of the scalp and at other times sensitiveness of the face, the teeth, the ears and other organs.

Dr. Dercum also mentions other disturbances of the nerves all over the body, which he describes as "prickling, creeping or velvety sensations" and disturbance of the special senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell. Frequently the patient is not able to read for more than a few minutes at a time, because of the blurring of the letters and because of the headache that is produced. There is often intense annoyance from the ordinary light that comes in through the window, so that the patient must protect his eyes with smoked glasses, and the complaint that everything appears misty or as though seen through a veil.

Patients frequently complain, Dr. Dercum explains, that they cannot hear clearly or understand what is said to them, and yet at the same time they are extremely sensitive to noises which, although insignificant, disturb them acutely.

This is accompanied by ringing in the ears, and disorders of smell and of taste are often present, the patient complaining of annoying smells and peculiar tastes which do not exist.

A very grave series of symptoms also are connected with the brain. The general nervous exhaustion reaches into the skull and the patient's mind becomes affected. Aside from his general irritability and impatience he is incapable of long continued mental effort. He is unable to fix his attention upon a subject, and if he endeavors to do so vague and confused impressions and ideas follow instead of a clear mental activity. At the same time painful sensations arise with headache and giddiness, with loss of memory, until it is not uncommon for the patient to declare that he is "losing his mind."

Along with this goes a lessening in the strength of will and associated with this there is also a lack of decision and the patient becomes vacillating and undecided and is even incapable of coming to a decision regarding even trivial matters.

Another distressing feature of neurasthenia is pointed out by Dr. Dercum. The patient is unusually sensitive and often feels hurt by fancied neglect or oversight on the part of friends or relatives. His emotions are readily excited. Totally inadequate causes may provoke marked depression and at other times boisterous laughter. A play at a theatre or a newspaper article may provoke him to tears and he may be pursued by unreasoning fears.

The symptoms of fear are quite remarkable. The patient may have an attack of fear while he is alone and becomes morbidly afraid of being left alone. There are also many special forms of fear to which the medical profession have given special names. "Thus some neurasthenics are attacked by 'fear,' Dr. Dercum writes, 'when they find themselves in open places—agoraphobia; in others, the fear comes on when they find themselves in narrow or close places—claustrophobia; the fear of being alone is called monophobia; the fear of crowds—anthropophobia, and so on."

Furthermore, the night holds terrors for the patient. He is likely to be troubled with insomnia and lie awake for long hours pursued by fears and worries and pains. And if he falls asleep he is frequently disturbed by distressing dreams.

"The patient dreams of murders, or terrible accidents, of being pursued by great danger, and, not infrequently awakens suddenly in a paroxysm of fright. Startling dreams, the nightmare, the incubus are by no means uncommon."

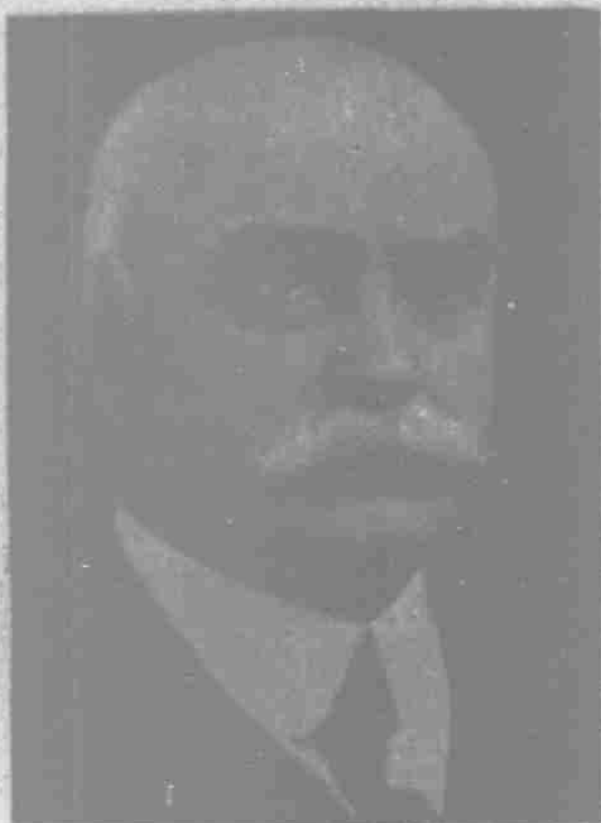
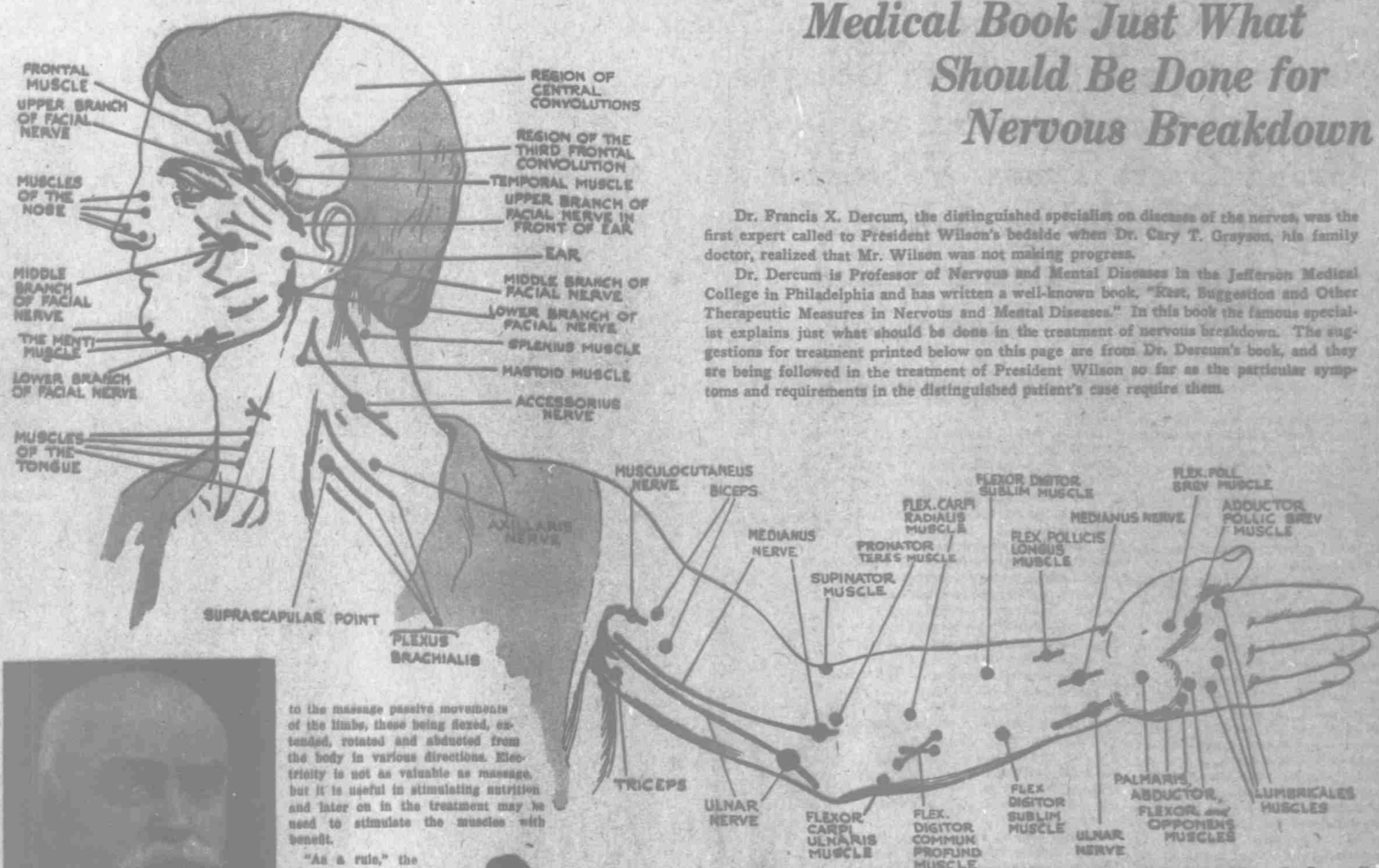
Passing to method of treatment, Dr. Dercum discusses the importance of an ample dietary and especially recommends milk. Little can be accomplished, he declares, by the use of medicines, although a few drops of tincture of cod liver oil given before meals will be of service to tone up the digestion, and a dose of effervescent sodium phosphate

President Wilson's Nerve Specialist Explains in a Recent

Medical Book Just What Should Be Done for Nervous Breakdown

Dr. Francis X. Dercum, the distinguished specialist on disease of the nerves, was the first expert called to President Wilson's bedside when Dr. Cary T. Grayson, his family doctor, realized that Mr. Wilson was not making progress.

Dr. Dercum is Professor of Nervous and Mental Diseases in the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and has written a well-known book, "Rest, Suggestion and Other Therapeutic Measures in Nervous and Mental Diseases." In this book the famous specialist explains just what should be done in the treatment of nervous breakdown. The suggestions for treatment printed below on this page are from Dr. Dercum's book, and they are being followed in the treatment of President Wilson so far as the particular symptoms and requirements in the distinguished patient's case require them.



Dr. Francis X. Dercum, President Wilson's Specialist, Who Is Directing His Treatment for Nervous Breakdown.

to the massage passive movements of the limbs, those being flexed, extended, rotated and abducted from the body in various directions. Electricity is not as valuable as massage, but it is useful in stimulating nutrition and later on in the treatment may be used to stimulate the muscles with benefit.

"As a rule," the doctor says, "electricity should be applied in the form of a slowly interrupted faradic current; and the nurse, who has been previously instructed in the more important motor points, makes the application in such a way that each group of muscles undergoes a given number of separate contractions. The applications should be at first limited to the flexors and extensors of the forearms and legs. Later, they may be made to the thighs, arms and trunk."

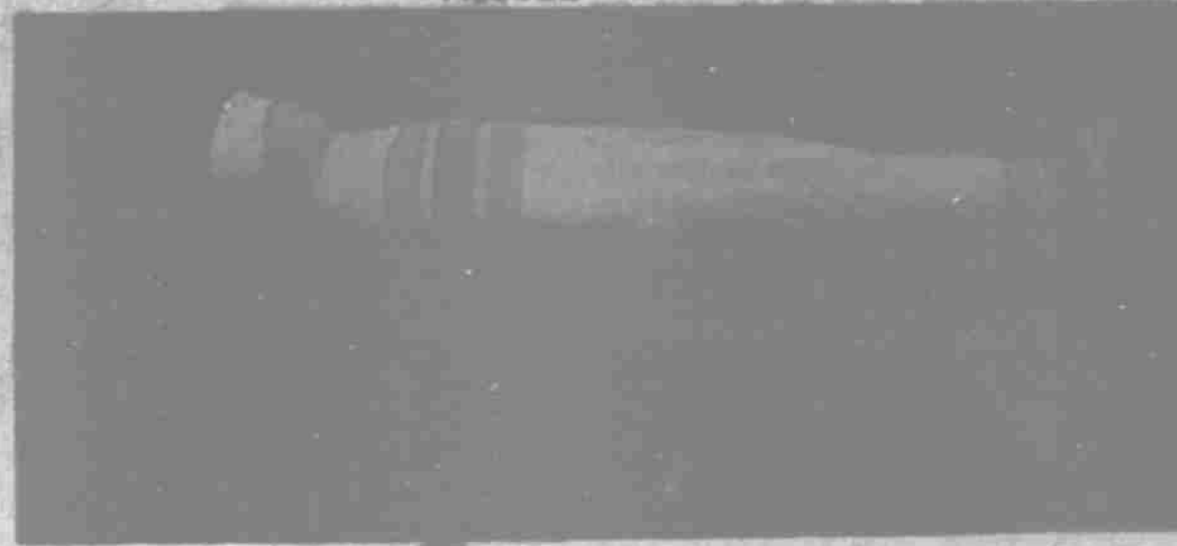
Dr. Dercum feels very strongly on the value of milk for the patient and even advises as much as twelve or more ounces of milk to be taken six times a day—with meals, between meals and at bedtime. In many cases from two to three quarts should be given in addition to the regular food and the patient should be able to digest the entire amount.

"Occasionally we find that the patient," Dr. Dercum writes, "presents an actual idiosyncrasy with regard to the milk, and is either unable to digest it at all or is able to digest it only with difficulty or in small quantities, even when it is modified in various ways. Under such circumstances it is necessary to resort to egg-feeding. Eggs are best given raw, and should be given in increasing number daily. The procedure is as follows: A raw egg is carefully opened and dropped into a cup in such a way that the yolk is not broken. The patient is then directed to swallow the egg whole with a single effort. As a rule, the trick is readily acquired and the patient experiences no unpleasant taste or other disagreeable sensation. It is best to administer the egg without salt, lemon-juice, or other attempt at flavoring. The white of egg is practically tasteless, and this is all that comes in contact with the tongue so long as the yolk remains unbroken."

At first, as a rule, one raw egg between meals is ordered; then the number is increased to two, three, four, five, six or more, as circumstances permit. Afterward raw eggs are added to each meal, the number being cautiously increased to as many as the patient is able to take; the eggs should be swallowed immediately



Method of Wrapping the Patient with the Drip Sheet. The Patient Stands in a Few Inches of Warm Water While a Cold Sheet Is Thrown Around Him.



Dr. Dercum Also Uses the Hot Water Pack. The Patient Is Wrapped in a Sheet Wring Out of Water at a Temperature of 110 Degrees F., Is Then Covered With Blankets and Allowed to Remain in the Pack for an Hour.



The Patient Is Then Vigorously Rubbed with the Wet Sheet Until a Reaction Is Established.

after the food of the meal proper has been taken. In this way six to eighteen or even more eggs a day can be given to neurasthenics, and, strange to say, readily digested by them.

If the eggs be restricted to feed exclusively the number may be very large indeed. Exceptionally the skin acquires a yellowish tinge. It appears that in massive egg-feeding some of the protein of the yolk may pass unchanged into the blood.

This may alarm the patient, as it suggests an attack of jaundice. However, the discoloration is a brighter yellow than that seen in jaundice and does not involve the conjunctiva. It disappears if the egg-feeding be discontinued or if the yolks be withdrawn and the egg-feeding restricted to the whites. In a few days the coloring becomes less pronounced and finally fades entirely.

If milk is not acceptable to the patient, buttermilk may be substituted and digested without difficulty. Buttermilk may for a time be given exclusively or both whole milk and buttermilk may be given separately at various intervals during the day, enough buttermilk being used to keep the bowels open.

Dr. Dercum Uses Electric Massage to Stimulate Nutrition and the Muscles.

The Electricity Should Be Applied by a Nurse Who Has Been Carefully Instructed in the Location of the Most Important Motor Points, So That the Application Shall Stimulate Each Group of Muscles Until They Undergo a Given Number of Separate Contractions. The Chart of Motor Points of the Head and Arm Given Above Is Made Up from "Nervous and Mental Diseases" by Dr. Dercum.

wines or acid wines should be avoided, although occasionally a little claret or Burgundy may be permitted. When the period of absolute rest is terminated and the patient has begun to exercise out of doors, or when the appetite flags a little, a bottle of light beer may, with advantage, be substituted for the milk at dinner. Tobacco should be forbidden or used in very moderate amounts.

The progress of the case can be judged by the increased weight of the patient. The patient should be weighed every two weeks, and increasing weight is an evidence of progress.

"If the case progresses well," Dr. Dercum writes, "there comes an end to the rest in bed period. As the days and weeks pass by, provided the case progresses favorably, various changes are noted. Not only does the patient increase in weight, but there is also a decided improvement in the other physical signs. The muscles become firm, the chilled extremities grow warm, the damp skin becomes dry, and the pallor of the surface gives way to normal flesh tints. At the same time a change is noted in the mental condition of the patient."

"After the first week or ten days of the nervousness and restlessness incident to the initial period of the treatment, the patient passes into a condition of placidity, indifference and contentment. The ever-increasing sense of physical well-being—the luxurious sense of comfort induced by the full feeding, the absolute quiet, and the various physiologic procedures—is such as to induce a state of extreme mental satisfaction. The patient usually remains in this condition until a large degree of improvement has been reached and maintained for some time."

"Sooner or later, however, a reaction sets in. Mental indifference and placidity now give way to spontaneity of thought and action and to a desire for activity, both mental and physical. The patient begins to be restless and to ask the physician when he may leave his bed or when he may begin to exercise."